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Unmolested Nazis gasp! in our midst

Boston — Now we know what we knew before but didn't know the extent of; now we know that there are Nazis, or people who were Nazis, imported (as opposed to homegrown) from Europe after the War, residing in America in peace and harmony. A young Boston attorney, aided by Congressman Barney Frank, brought out the story of the Russian collaborators with Naziism who had been invited into America by this government in direct disobedience of presidential orders. We saw it on "60 Minutes" two weeks ago, then all America read of it and saw and heard it on television and radio. As one, Americans gasped.

The gasp went something like this: oh my, ch my, these dreadful people, these horrid torturing fiends, these Nazis, entered our fair land and have lived here unmolested, and all because the venal American government wished to pick their brains about Communism.

That's how the gasp went. There was no end to the recitation of the horrors these wretches had inflicted on mankind, and only those with hearts of stone could have been unmoved by the stories that filled the front pages of America's newspapers.

Nobody bothered to ask: Well, did the United States government learn anything of value from these people? And, if the government learned something of value did that information diminish materially the success of Communism in the post-war world? It was as if the question dare not be asked just in case we might learn that the answer to both questions was, is, Yes.

Now I don't know if the answer to both of those questions is yes, but I think some of the awe-inspiring media attention given to the presence of the collaborators with Naziism might have been given to those questions and to discovering the answers to those questions.

Naziism was monstrous. Agreed. Naziism is more or less a dead letter. Agreed. There is some resurgence of Naziism and there is some idiotic nostalgia in some quarters for the Nazi period, but just the same, the world is less threatened by Naziism today than it is by — may one say it? — Russian expansionism. Agreed?

Maybe not, maybe not agreed at all. If there is a consensus in the intellectual and the media communities about grave matters of politics, that consensus looks like this: The most horrible thing that ever happened to the whole world was the Hitler period in Germany, and the most awful thing currently happening to the whole world is apartheid in South Africa.

Virtually everybody who speaks and is heard beyond his living room will at the drop of a pin go into a routine about Naziism and at the drop of a second pin he'll go into a routine about South Africa. Which is not to deny the evil that was Naziism or the conundrum that is the social and political system of South Africa.

Still the question has to be asked: Isn't Communism the Naziism of today? Isn't Communism, which is alive and spreading, worth more attention today than the evil, Naziism, that came before it? And some other questions need asking, too, among them: Aren't governments that routinely kill hordes of people worse than governments that routinely discriminate against hordes of people? (Or, if you need or want it spelled out, aren't the Communist hell-holes worse than South Africa?)

We come back to the Nazis in our midst. Possibly their importation was a terrible mistake. Perhaps nothing of value was learned from them. Perhaps. But don't we owe it to ourselves to find out? And if we find out that the American importation of Nazi collaborators served a useful purpose, isn't the next question: What price are we willing to pay to stymie Communism?

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